

Extras 651

Chapter 651 The Strongest Elf

'She's the strongest Elf in the Continent, huh?'

That was Rey's initial thought when he saw Feralia. Not only did it make sense, considering how she was able to hold out for so long, but it also gave him an insight as to why she held on for so long.

'She's the strongest, so she doesn't want to abandon her duties...'

In a way, the Elf reminded him of Lucielle—only the good side, of course.

"Her Miasma Poisoning is on a far stronger and deeper level than the others, and due to her struggling with it for so long, it has pretty much spread to all parts of her body." He muttered, walking even closer until he reached her bedside.

All her internal organs had grown rotten, and even her brain must have been degenerated beyond any proper comprehension.

Anyone would look at such a case and say there was no hope.

'But... I suppose this is why Divine-Tier Skills exist. To create miracles when it doesn't seem like there is hope at all.'

Rey reckoned he could use Healing Magic of the Divine Tier to take care of his patient's physical state while simultaneously using his Mana to cleanse hers.

'It'll be a delicate process, considering how both have to be done in tandem. If I neglect one or the other, it'll disrupt the balance and she could die.'

And, despite how powerful Rey was at the moment, he could not cure death.

Hence... 'I just have to give this one my all.'

He needed both of his eyes for the operation, and he even had his whole senses working overtime—though he really didn't need to go that far—just to make sure he would not make a single mistake.

He healed her rotten body with his Magic, slowly acclimating her to health while removing the impurities one organ at a time.

There was a possibility that his Mana would overwhelm her organs if he used if he rushed it into her, so he took it slow and steady.

And, of course, he protected the spectators from the overpowering effect that his Mana caused by managing the Space around him and them. 'And now...' Slightly sticking his tongue out and licking his lips, he gave the finishing touches—cleansing her of the last vestiges of Miasma and also healing her from the inside out.

The result was astounding!

~VWUUUUSH!~

Her body became fairer than any other Elf in the room, and her purplish peach colored hair danced behind her as she sat up almost immediately.

Her beautiful face was without blemishes, and her naked body.... yes... it blossomed so beautifully that everyone gawked in sheer captivation of her elegance.

She was a sculpted definition of Elven grace.

"Thank you..." Were the first words that proceeded from her lips as she opened her violet eyes and stared straight at Rey.

Her tone was gentle, and so was her smile.

"My name is Feralia, and I shall forever remember this moment of salvation until I become one with Nature. You, my savior, am I forever indebted to."

Rey raised an eyebrow as she stared sweetly at him, her eyes bright with overflowing respect and gratitude.

'Okay... this is weird. She isn't acting at all like I expected. She's an Esteemed Elder, so I expected some kind of attitude. Even the other Elves acted up after I healed them, but this one... what's going on?'

After reaching the heights of confusion, Rey decided to check her Status Window.

That was when he realized what exactly was happening.

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Feralia Kai Sereth

- Race: Elf - Class: Esteemed Grand Mage (S-Tier)

- Level: 250 (90.9% EXP) - Life Force: 2,500 - Mana Level: 5,000 - Combat Ability: 4,900 - Stat Points: 0

- Skills (Exclusive): [Absolute Runic Mastery]. [Farsight]. [Time Stop]

- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Grand Magic Application]. [Greater Spell Casting]. [Grand Rune Layout]. [Elevated Magic Sense]. [Life Force Recovery]. [Grand Mana Recovery]. [Absolute Elemental Magic]. - Alignment: Lawful Good

[Additional Information]

An Esteemed Elder among the Elves, in charge of fighting the war against the Dragons. A hero for the Elves, as well as the one recognized as the most powerful among them.

After being saved by Rey, with his essence seeping into the furthest recesses of her being, her body has been forever transformed and tied to him. [End Of Information]

'Ah, crap... I get it now!' Rey nearly gasped, but he kept it to himself.

Since her condition was so severe, he literally poured his Mana through every facet of her body—including her brain—and that had to have altered everything she thought and perceived.

'My Mana is apparently very desirable to the Elves, so being exposed to it for so long, and throughout her body... I guess she sort of feels some kind of bond with me.'

Rey didn't mind that the strongest Elf in the Continent was practically on his side at this point, but he still found it weird the way she kept looking and smiling at him.

He couldn't describe it, but it really was similar to Lucielle's. But, at the very least, this one was showing restraint... for now, at least.

'Her Stats have also permanently increased for some reason. Is that also due to exposure to my Magic for an extended period of time? Can I have that effect on people?' Rey reckoned he would have to try it out again to find out.

'I should have observed the Status Windows of everyone I healed if I knew there was the possibility of change. Well, I'm sure another opportunity will present itself.' He glanced at the audience, who were all shell-shocked by the return of their Esteemed Elder.

Esme was smiling too, so he reckoned she had to be happy as well. Her eyes hidden under the hood seemed a little too wide for comfort, but Rey chalked it up to being surprised by the outcome.

'I'll have to see if I can improve Esme's Stats with my abilities later. For now...' Returning his gaze to the Esteemed Elder before him, he noticed she was still smiling at him.

"Um..." Rey stretched out his hand and patted her on the head. "Welcome back to the land of the living."

Chapter 652 The Grave Situation

"I confess to assisting Aurora to depart for the Western Continent in order to obtain tools that would aid us in the war..."

Feralia Kai Sereth's tone was low as she spoke, staring at the group that gathered before her.

The other Elven Leaders, most of them who were also recently healed by Rey, were present. Tatiana, who also held an executive position in the Camp also had her seat. Finally, Rey and Esme were present as well.

They were all seated in the meeting hall within Feralia's massive tent, with a table right in front of all their chairs.

Rey was especially interested in the rundown of the situation with the Dragons, so he had her take it from the top. So far, he had learned quite a lot.

'She's stopped looking at me in that weird way now, so I guess asking her about the whole thing was a good idea.' He smiled to himself as he listened to more of her narration.

Apparently, the war was becoming too arduous for the Elves to handle, and Feralia couldn't bear to watch her sisters continue dying at the hands of the Dragons--or suffering any kind of casualty.

She had to succumb to Aurora's convincing words.

"Once we obtained those tools, our natural abilities were amplified to a large extent, and we were able to take them by surprise with our newfound power and versatility." The way Feralia talked about the event, like it was some spectacular period, made the other Elves nod and nearly burst into tears.

It seemed they all remembered their moments of victory; the calm before the storm.

"But, right when the tides were shifting, and we were so close to winning the war... those horrifying things began to manifest."

Rey already knew what Feralia meant by her words. He had suspected it for a while, especially after observing all of the symptoms thus far, but he allowed her to continue.

"The undying Dragons... they changed the battle completely."

Feralia went on to describe how the Dragons wreaked havoc on the battlefield after that. They never tired, and they never bled.

They just kept on fighting and fighting.

For Elves, who were living beings and were also not built for combat, the strain of fighting a battle against Undead was overwhelming.

"Their power was great. Their tenacity was unmatched. And... their ruthlessness was..." Feralia nearly choked on her words as she remembered her time in the battlefield.

"Even those who escaped were afflicted by their corrupt energy. There was no escape. There... is no escape."

The forlorn expressions of the Elves added weight to all that Feralia said.

"We've been holding the fort for so long, but there's no telling how much longer we will last." She muttered, staring at Rey with sheer concern.

"There are too many disadvantages..."

After about a full minute of silence, with only sighs here and there, Rey finally spoke up.

"This is all a very sharp turn from what I experienced in the Elven Community. The contrast is a little jarring."

The lush greeneries and electrifying atmosphere could not be compared to this bleak landscape. It almost felt like Rey just visited two different worlds.

"All the Elves in the Community look so cheerful and carefree, yet the situation has reached such a terrifying level... I find that odd."

Perhaps it was their religious views--the strong belief they had in The Oracle--that let them have such childlike faith that everything would be fine.

It was dangerous to think that way; at least that was what Rey thought.

"We can't afford to let anxiety seep into the Community." One of the Elven Leaders responded to Rey's observation.

"Hmm?"

"Anxiety creates fear, which causes doubt. We cannot afford the Youngs to be poisoned by such doubt—not when their faith in The Oracle and Nature's teachings are yet to be fully developed." Another Elder also spoke up.

More expressed their concerns, allowing Rey to understand their rationale.

'Seems like most of the people left in the Community are Youngs. They don't want them exposed to the hardships of battle or responsibilities. That seems noble, but also very naive.' Rey sighed to himself.

Still, he couldn't fault their logic.

'Despite being very old, the Young Ones are taught and trained to be dependent on the Elders. Their child-like nature will make them poor combatants. In a way, they could turn into liabilities if they're brought into the battlefield.'

It was no wonder why the people of the Camp were hesitant to ask for backup despite desperately needing the help. Not only did they have no way to deal with the Miasma, which more numbers would do nothing to solve, but most of the viable candidates for battle were Youngs.

When Rey looked at things from an objective standpoint, he could only think of one thing.

'These people are doomed. If I didn't come here, they would all be wiped out.'

It wasn't like Rey felt some kind of kinship for the Elves. After all, they were all sorts of things, and a bunch of them even hurt Esme. But...

'They aren't bad people. When they're not being racist, they're just overly kind and naive.'

They certainly didn't deserve Genocide.

'Of course, they're not entirely innocent either. Their views on Half Elves are especially too extreme. I'm sure if I didn't have the ability to control the Elves, I would have a completely negative experience here.'

But... that was only partly their fault.

'The true architect of all this is The Oracle. I'm certain the current disposition of the Elves was given by that person. If they wanted, they could command the Elves to stop... but they don't do that.'

Rey couldn't say anything about that, though.

Not only were the Elves completely loyal to this deity of theirs, but he also needed their assistance. He couldn't do anything to reduce his chances of saving Alicia.

'The most I can do now is to help these people and then be on my way.' Turning to look at Esme, who turned to look at him too, Rey nodded at her.

She smiled and nodded back in agreement.

'Why don't we make an army of our own? Should be fun...'

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Chapter 653 Elemental Army

"Divine Magic: Grand Elemental Summon."

As soon as Rey uttered those words, several entities began to emerge from the depths of the ground—almost as if rising from an abyss that connected them to another realm.

The vast, darkened plains that existed right beyond the Elven Camp, now gradually became populated with the entities that came forth from Rey's call. In their hundreds, they rose to their feet, their daunting figures at least five meters in height.

Fire, Earth, Wind, Water, and Lightning Elementals all gathered in their vast numbers—thousands of them—and stood still at Rey's commands.

Before long, even the darkened ground began to fade off. The Miasma that was creeping upon the land of the Elves retreated away from the group thanks to the Mana that Rey pulsated into the ground.

Before long, the plains—despite being stripped of the plants and other gifts of nature—returned to its original state.

"A-amazing!"

"T-this power... it truly is divine!"

"As expected from a herald of The Oracle!"

As one would expect, the Elves all gawked at the sight that Rey displayed to them. Not only were they shocked to their bones, but their hearts were elated and filled with immense hope.

Their deity, after constant prayers and dedication, had finally responded to their prayers.

For that alone, the Elves knelt and worshiped.

'Damn. They really are religious...' Rey saw all of this and smiled awkwardly, before turning his attention towards Esme.

She looked like she had something to say so he wanted to hear her out.

"I want to try something too..." She said, drawing close to him.

Her eyes were directed at the several Elementals he just created in the blink of an eye—all of them in the Grand Tier. It was impossible not to be impressed by his power, all things considered.

That wasn't all he planned to do as well.

Rey was also going to create weapons using his [Divine Weapon Creation] and grant the Elves some artillery to utilize as means of protection. The ideal weapons would be long-range ones, so that none of them would have to get too close to Miasma.

Plus, since Dragons were creatures of flight, things like canons or flamethrowers would work best for the cause.

However, all of that was paused due to Esme's current interest.

"What do you want to try?" Rey asked with a smile, already sensing some measure of competitiveness in her eyes.

He had noticed it for some time now, but chose not to speak of it.

'As much as she appreciates me helping the Elves, Esme also wants to play her part in helping them...'

However, thus far, it seemed like Rey was always the one coming to the rescue.

All of that was about to change.

Esme floated into the air, above all of the Elementals that now spread out to surround the Elven Camp. Both her arms stretched forth and she called forth her own power.

"Absolute Elemental Summon."

~VWUUUUUUUSH!~

A brilliant rush of power coalesced at her point of contact, easily causing all manner of reactions to occur all at the same time. The immense energy turned into a Core, and as soon as it manifested, elements began to form around it.

Winds swirled around the area like a whirlwind, with earth rising all over the core.

Lightning constantly struck, and flames burst all over, licking everything it consumed with utmost intensity. The hissing sounds of water and ice oozed through the air, until all of the combined and conflicting elements stabilized around the core.

Then, the final product was unveiled.

"Huuu..." Esme finally exhaled as she concluded the process, her glowing blue eyes staring straight for the entity she had just created with practically all of her usable Mana.

"Supreme General... Absolute Elemental."

The 'thing' that floated before her was an amalgamation of all the elements. It felt like they were warring inside it, but it was in such a symphony that the entity seemed like an embodiment of destructive perfection.

Purple flames danced around its bulking body—especially its skull-like face. It had crackles of lightning dancing around its body, and its body felt like a mix of liquid and molten magma. Cold air rose from half of its body, while searing heat did the same on the other half.

All in all, it was an embodiment of the elements.

"Descend."

~WHUUUM!~

The Absolute Elemental fell to the ground, despite being hundreds of feet in the air, and landed right in front of the other Elementals that Rey summoned.

The difference in height was too great to be ignored.

If the others were five feet at most, then the Absolute Elemental was fifteen. It also had a much bigger stature and its imposing presence dwarfed the others.

No one could argue—this one was the Leader.

"So... what do you think?" Esme swiftly appeared before Rey as soon as her own Elemental positioned itself in front of all the others.

"Showoff... ow!" He muttered, receiving a jab in his arm for exactly that.

Esme laughed, strangely feeling refreshed despite the heavy toll that the Elemental took on her Mana. Something about contributing to the cause made her so cheerful.

"I wonder who the real showoff is." She responded to Rey with a playful tone.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"You don't?"

"Nope! Not at all!"

They both laughed after that, almost like the teenagers that they were.

Both Rey and Esme knew that the former could summon tons of the Elemental that Esme brought forth. He would even have some spare Mana afterwards.

But he chose not to.

'You were probably being considerate towards me, weren't you, Rey?' Esme smiled at him as she gave him another elbow jab.

Her heart slightly jumped as she watched him smile sheepishly. Something about moments like these almost made Esme forget the current situation, and her place in his life.

"What are you feeling right now?" Rey drew his face close to Esme as he asked the question.

"E-eh?"

Her flustered face nearly turned red like a tomato as she experienced it all at once.

"I mean... do you feel better now?"

Esme internalized the question, turning her attention to everything that had changed about the Elven Camp upon their arrival there.

There was only one correct answer to the question.

"Yeah!"

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Chapter 654 Layered Thoughts

"We'll be leaving now. However, I'll be in touch with you all as soon as I conclude my other business."

Rey and Esme stood before the entire Elven Camp, and while they all had mixed variants of the same emotion, they all made sure to display the purest form of gratitude towards the two of them for their contributions.

Not just for the Elementals, but also the Weapons that Rey provided for the Elves. There was also the important service of healing all of those with Miasma Poisoning and erecting a much more powerful barrier than anything they could have possibly done on their own.

What words could they possibly render to their savior that would sufficiently express just how thankful they felt towards him?

It was impossible for the Elves.

"We will expect your return, Rey. I... will expect it." Feralia bowed her head as she smiled at Rey with those strange eyes that he found a bit awkward.

"Yeah. Sure..." He responded, albeit a bit sheepishly.

He was glad that Feralia didn't actively make any move on him. That would have made things more problematic for him.

'Seems she recognizes her place. That's good... whew!'

"You don't have to die for your cause. If the enemy seems too much for you to handle, there's no shame in retreating and fighting another day—for the sake of the Youngs."

All of the Elves nodded in allegiance to Rey and his words, and never before had he felt prouder of the Race. They actually listened to common sense for once.

"Welp... bye."

Drawing Esme close to himself, Rey prepared to teleport. As he did so, however, he caught a glimpse of all the Elves bowing their heads and thanking him with all their might.

"THANK YOU SO MUCH, LORD REY!"

The feeling he got at that point caused him to smile a little.

'Not bad... not bad at all.' His thoughts trailed as his Spatial Magic finally kicked in and he vanished completely from their sight.

'I understand it all, Rey...'

As Feralia gazed longingly into the sky, a brilliant smile formed on her face as tears streamed down her eyes.

'I am not the one you desire. And though my heart shall forever long for you, I will never find solace in the warmth of your gaze.'

Was this her punishment for leading so many of her sisters to their death? Was this retribution from Nature for secretly aiding Aurora in breaking the rules?

She had no idea.

'I never thought love could feel this good... yet so sorrowful.' Feralia smiled, closing her eyes as she pictured Rey.

'Still, I will accept my fate. If this is my crucible, I will gladly endure it.'

As the image of Rey grew vivid in her mind, however, the girl beside him also slowly entered her mind.

'That lady... she seemed so familiar.' Feralia could only see a portion of her face due to the hood she wore, but after having many opportunities and angles to gain a somewhat holistic picture of her face, she thought only one thing.

'Why does she resemble Ciela so much?'

Feralia didn't want to think too deeply about it, but the thought constantly echoed in her mind.

'If that's the case, could it be...? No, no way...'

She finally decided to shrug off her thoughts and return to the inner recesses of her tent within the Camp.

'There's no way a Half Elf would accompany a herald of The Oracle.'

Rey and Esme floated silently in the late afternoon sky.

Their eyes constantly shifted from the dimming orange glow of the sun to the landscape below them, and finally to each other.

After moments of silence, Esme finally broke it with a question she had been meaning to ask.

"What's on your mind, Rey?"

"A lot of things. You're going to have to be specific." He replied with a slightly casual tone.

It was clear that he constantly thought about a lot of things, though only facets ended up being brought to the surface. For example, throughout his stay with the Elves, he was communicating with Emil.

Yet, it never really showed in his demeanor.

Ever since he attained an elevated state, Rey found it easier to fragment his thoughts into layers, so only a fraction of it rose to the surface.

"I'm talking about the situation with the Elves... and the Miasma... all of that."

"...."

For a moment, Rey refrained from speaking. He just floated with Esme for a few seconds, almost as if deciding to share his thoughts with her or not.

He eventually opened the lips, evidently opting for the former.

"This whole thing reeks of Adrien." He began, a slight frown forming on his face. "I don't want to make any assumptions this time, so i'll have to confirm things first. But..."

"But what?"

"Nothing. Perhaps it's just my intuition or something."

"...." This time it was Esme's turn to be silent.

Rey sighed a little as he continued. "I considered leaving Emil in their Camp, but the possibility of Adrien being involved makes me not want to take that risk."

He planned to simply wait things out and observe through his Summoned Elementals.

"I already cast Observation and Recording Magic around the area, so I can get footage of the situation whenever I desire."

Rey already knew he had to have a fundamental idea of what he was dealing with before taking any direct steps forward.

"If Adrien is really involved, this whole thing just got a lot complicated."

As always, he had no idea what his motives could be, but Rey didn't want to get caught up in anything.

'Since the Elves have pretty much become my assets at this point, it's unavoidable that I'm involved. All of this is only secondary, though...'

For now, Rey only had one real goal.

'I have to bring Esme to The Oracle.

"That's actually a smart move, Rey. I... actually wanted to stay back, to help them more and all..." She finally confessed, surprising Rey, considering the kind of thoughts he was just having before she spoke up.

'I didn't expect her to be so upfront about her feelings so quickly.'

"Even though they're racist towards me, and treat me horribly, I still want to help them no matter what. It's crazy, right?"

"No, it's not." Rey shook his head. "You're just a good person, Esme."

A good person who desired some form of validation from her own people.

'As much as I understand that, however...' Rey slowly began to prepare his heart as he took in a deep breath.

"We need to focus on the mission for now."

As soon as Esme heard this, she nodded and quickly shook off whatever emotion that was slowly rising within her.

"Yeah, you're right!" She spoke up with determination. "So tell me... how did your meeting with The Oracle go? Something tells me it didn't go so well."

Rey sighed, causing Esme to get even more curious.

"What? She didn't even speak to you at all?"

"No, she did, but..." Rey thought really hard about how to word what happened to Esme, and even considered whether or not to share his own worries about it to her.

However, after deliberate considerations, he simply chose to be honest with her.

"... The Oracle wants to see you."

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Chapter 655 Linked Connection

"How strange..."

After hearing all of Rey's detailed narration of everything that happened in the Shrine, those words naturally proceeded from Esme's lips.

"Right? I thought about it for so long, but it still makes no sense to me."

"Yeah..." Esme mumbled. "Why would they request for me specifically? I'm the hated Half Elf vermin, after all..."

"Well, I think—"

"Guess we'll find out once I ask them." She interrupted Rey, snapping her fingers once she made her choice.

"Wait, Esme. It's actually dangerous to—!"

"I know what's going on in your mind. It's possible that they want to execute me or something. However, all of this lies in conjecture. Are you really willing to throw away all your efforts thus far for just that?"

Rey had a rather conflicted expression on his face. He wanted to open his lips to say "Maybe?" but something stopped him from speaking out loud.

Esme smiled as soon as she saw this, shrugging a little nonchalantly. "It's fine, Rey! I also have many questions I want to ask this Oracle person, so it's a win-win for both of us."

It almost seemed like Esme was the one trying to convince Rey to go at this point. The latter understood why she was doing it, and instantly realized that being more difficult would only be an insult to her resolve.

"Thanks, Esme... really."

"I believe I owe you even more thanks." She beamed with a smile. "I guess I really was relevant to this whole adventure, after all!"

Rey laughed upon hearing this. "Yeah, I guess I'll have to thank Ater later. He always has such good sense on matters like this."

"Yup! You should! Do you think he predicted that this would happen?"

"Pfft! No way!"

The two continued in this good spirit as they increased their pace, their attention fixed on the path ahead that led to their goal.

—The Elven Shrine.

The Elven Shrine was deserted at the point when Rey and Esme arrived, much to their relief.

There was no need for any kinds of formality, so they both simply sped into the outer court and landed on the hallowed grounds.

"You ready?" Rey turned to Esme, who had already done away with her hood and was wearing her usual white robe and the rest of her gear.

"Yup!"

As soon as she said this, they were transported to the inner sanctum by Rey's Skill. The statue stood in its usual position, and the general ambiance remained the same—solemn, calm, and silent.

But, all of that was soon shattered.

"A-arrrrghhh!" Esme let out a sharp cry as she fell to the ground, clutching her head the second she entered the sanctum.

"E-Esme—?!"

Rey instantly rushed to her side, holding her tight before she fell to her knees. Her expression depicted something akin to pain, but it was more as though she was overwhelmed by something strong.

"What's happening to you? Can you say something?"

Esme couldn't speak coherent words. She just kept groaning as her body slightly convulsed.

Using his Appraisal to check her Status Window, Rey couldn't see her Life Force or any other Stat of hers being affected, so he was reluctant to think this was an attack.

He did notice a Status Condition, though.

~Status Condition: Linked Connection (Extreme)~

'Is this the connection all Elves have with The Oracle? Is Esme feeling it all at once now because she's in the Shrine?'

Rey had no answers, and he feared that taking her out now would completely disrupt whatever process was taking place

—especially if it could be beneficial.

Still... he didn't want to see Esme in any more pain.

"What the hell are you doing Oracle? Stop hurting Esme!" He yelled out, but was met with no response.

That was the last straw for him.

'For all I know, she could be attacking Esme's soul or something. There's no guarantee that any of this is positive!' He gritted his teeth and enveloped the both of them in his Mana.

'Let's get out of here!'

~ZZZZTTTZZ!~

A barrier suddenly manifested within the shrine, shrouding both Rey and Esme in its brilliant white and blue glory.

That wasn't all, though.

'What's happening? Why can't I teleport out?!' A bead of sweat formed on Rey's face as slight hints of panic began to seep out of his facade.

'Damnit! Damnit!! Damnit!!!'

All of those overwhelming feelings were swiftly suppressed, but he couldn't help but constantly feel the anxiety rise as he found the crying Esme and him stuck in the barrier.

Before he could think of something else—like destroying the barrier with brute force—a bright light suddenly covered everything and everyone around.

The last thing Rey saw in the Shrine was the face of the statue staring intently at Esme; almost as if it had come alive.

"What the hell are you—?!"

~SHIIIIINNNGGG!~

A rush coursed through Rey's body. It almost felt like the kind of sensation when he switched zones or teleported to a new location.

Perhaps both of those.

"U-urghh..." Esme's light groans entered his ears, and he swiftly opened his eyes to see her recoiling from all that sharp and overwhelming sensation that she felt moments earlier.

She was still in his arms, so he clutched her tightly and looked around and ahead of himself at the same time.

"T-this place... where are we?"

It seemed like a golden palace, with golden pillars in multiple positions, leading high into the ceiling above. The place was akin to a cathedral, but one designed with the immaculate prestige of a palace.

It was most beautiful.

Then, Rey felt a presence that completely turned his world upside down.

His perception blurred, and he felt weakness seep through his body as soon as the scent trickled into his nose. Goosebumps began to manifest all over his body as the figure manifested right in front of him.

... In the form of a woman clad in the most pristine robe.

"You really are not The Hero." The woman whispered with her soft, melodious voice as she cast her icy blue gaze on Rey.

"How strange..."

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Chapter 656 The Oracle

She was perfect.

Her hair was pure white, whiter than snow. She had sparkling blue eyes, more precious than any gem that ever existed. A light veil stood firm on her face, decorated by jewels that glittered with gold and blue. Her white robe was also complemented with golden decors and jewels that were reminiscent of the deep blue sea.

Her long ears stuck out of her veil and hair, and her cute—cold, silent, and calm—beauty made everything around her blur in comparison.

The world around her was a golden cathedral-like palace, with candle-lights and sacred lightings giving everything a luster of mysterious sanctity.

Still, none was more mysterious or sanctified than she was.

As her gaze connected to Rey, he felt an electrifying sensation course through his whole body.

Never in all his life had he met a more beautiful woman, and he doubted he would ever be able to. Her whole identity was carved from perfection itself.

No, she was perfection.

Her scent was the strongest, and it was also the sweetest. None came close—not by a long shot. Rey found himself nearly losing himself in all of it, but managed to retain his sanity and complete consciousness as he stared at her in silence.

'T-this... is the Oracle?' He swallowed his saliva, feeling his heart race as he held Esme tightly to himself.

Ever since he laid eyes on her, he already recognized something.

... Something difficult to dismiss.

'Why does she look so much like Esme?!'

Their resemblance didn't stop at noticeable features like the hair or eyes, but also facial features and the overall aura they presented. She looked like a more mature and refined version of the girl he had in his arms.

Perhaps a long-lost relative? A big sister? A cousin? A mother? No... maybe not.

Compared to Esme, this woman that stood before Rey was leagues above. She existed in a realm far from other Elves—truly worthy to be revered as a deity.

'Calm yourself, Rey. Calm down...' He maintained a stable, consistent breath, finally reaching a point of composure where he could utter words to the woman before him.

Before he could mouth anything, though—

"Y-you... why do I look so much like you?" Esme muttered, her eyes wide open as she looked at The Oracle with a stupefied expression.

'A-ah! She's opened her eyes already? I was so occupied with my thoughts that I didn't notice!'

Rey looked at Esme with a bit of worry—or perhaps a little more than that—considering how shocking it would be for her. Even though he didn't understand what was happening, he wasn't the one who would be the most confused.

As he struggled for the words to say, or whether he should even speak at all, to the stunned Esme, they both heard the words of the woman once again.

"Welcome to my home." Her voice was the sweetest thing imaginable, almost causing Rey to feel a sensation course through all parts of his body.

It was nearly orgasmic in a sense, but he quickly acclimated to the sensation.

"You did as I instructed and brought her here. Now that you have an audience with me, you may speak." Rey found himself nearly sweating buckets as he stared at The Oracle's stoic eyes, watching her emotionless demeanor as she addressed the two of them.

'Esme is understandably shocked, and so am I. But... I don't know when next I'll have a chance like this again, and I can't dawdle on this task!' Tightly clenching his fist, he braced himself with all the resolve he could muster and decided to finally speak up.

"It is as I told you from the shrine. I am an Otherworlder, and one of my friends has been cursed with a deep sleep she can not wake up from. I desperately need your assistance in curing her of this curse."

The Oracle listened to all he said in calm silence.

Rey took this time to pour out his heart, though still holding Esme close to him for some reason. His loud voice echoed in the immaculate hall, and while both he and Esme appeared to be a stain within The Oracle's world, she paid him rapt attention.

She listened to all he said. Until finally...

"That is all. Please, Oracle, help my friend!" Rey concluded his words, even going as far as finally letting go of Esme and bowing before the deity that stood in front of him.

His desperation was palpable, and The Oracle could see every ounce of it. Surely, his sincerity would speak to her no matter the—

"No."

As soon as Rey heard the answer that The Oracle rendered to him, his eyes twitched, widening slowly as he processed the information.

"H-huh...?"

"I can't just lift the curse of your friend. And so, I refuse your request."

Rey felt his heart racing even quicker than usual. All of it was instantly suppressed. As the final embers of reverence towards The Oracle turned into rage, and was snuffed out by The System, he found himself in an instant rollercoaster of emotions.

As much as he tried to hide it, he was already gritting his teeth.

"Why...?" His voice trailed as he began to breathe heavily.

"I simply can not—"

"Bullshit!" Before Rey realized it, he had raised his voice, as well as his head, staring point-blank at The Oracle that stood before him.

"I can see your Status Window. I know you have a Skill that can help me accomplish that!" He yelled out, his face a mix of desperation and sheer annoyance.

Rey already knew this wasn't the best way to ask for favors—especially from an entity like The Oracle.

But he was at his wit's end here.

He had fulfilled all the necessary conditions and finally came so close to his goal. The Oracle indeed had the power to help him.

So why...?

"Why won't you do anything if you have all it takes?!"

[STATUS WINDOW] - Name: The Oracle

- Race: High Elf (Transcendent)

- Class: Guardian Of H'Trae (SS-Tier)
- Level: 999 (Max) - Life Force: 999,999
- Mana Level: 999,9999
- Combat Ability: 999,999
- Stat Points: 0
- Skills (Exclusive): [Clairvoyance]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Voice Of The World]. [Curse Of The World].[All Magic]. [Perfect Domain]. [Link Connection]
- Alignment: Lawful Neutral

[Additional Information]

The guardian of the world, and herald of the will of Nature. They are the protector of balance, and the deity of the Elves.

Do not ever make this one your enemy.

[End Of Information]

Chapter 657 Web Of Intricacy

'S-she's impossible!'

That was Rey's initial thought when he saw her Status Window. This was the second time in his life that he would see an SS-Tier entity, and the last time that happened... things didn't end so well for him.

'All her Skills are in the SS-Tier, and her Exclusive Skill is just like mine. It's SSS-Tier!' His eyes nearly widened as soon as he realized he couldn't see through its details.

No matter how perfect his Perfect Divine Appraisal was, there was a certain limit to it. It couldn't appraise anything within the SSS-Tier, which meant any Skill or Class that Rey couldn't properly examine was in that realm.

'[Clairvoyance], huh? What does that mean, really?' Could she see everything going on in H'Trae anytime she wanted? Or did it have to do with an ability to see through the past, present, and future? Rey wanted to know so badly—at least, that was until The Oracle told him "No."

After hearing that, he could no longer hold his thoughts back.

"You have so much power... so much authority... and yet you allow all of this to happen? You won't heal my friend even though you can! You won't protect the Elves even though you can! You... I don't understand!"

Rey remembered the sleeping body of Alicia that he left behind in the Capital, just as he remembered the several Elves who suffered before his very eyes due to the raging war.

'I don't get it! Even if you look down on other Races, why would you allow the Elves to go through that?!' It made no sense to Rey.

"You are too small and inexperienced to understand these things." The Oracle told him in a monotone, completely unfazed by his shouts and screams.

Within a second, Rey's anger vanished and his emotions returned to perfect serenity.

"I understand that if you have the power to do something for the ones you have a duty to, then you should!"

With The Oracle's power, she would easily be able to snap her fingers and all the Dragons on the Eastern Continent would meet their end. Yet... she did nothing.

"Perhaps. But... that would ultimately solve nothing."

"What?"

"The will of the world must prevail. The flow must be followed, and its rightful end must be reached. One way... or the other."

"What are you saying?" Rey's gritted teeth were exposed at this point, but The Oracle ignored them.

"The mere fact that I possess this power does not provide me the obligation to use it as I see fit. It ultimately solves nothing."

"How? I think it solves plenty!"

"Do you want this world to be destroyed, Rey Skylar?" As soon as The Oracle said those words, Rey shivered slightly.

'She knows my name. Did she check my Status? Appraisal wasn't part of her Skill-set, but maybe it's a function of [Clairvoyance].'

It was also possible that she heard someone call him that in the Land of The Elves, since she could apparently see everything happening in it.

Or maybe...

"No. I don't want this world to be destroyed." Rey responded.

"Then pay rapt attention. If I interfere, then The Dragon Emperor will interfere, and that will ultimately lead to the destruction of this world as you know it."

"What are you talking about—?!"

"Reset. Whatever I can see and respond to, he can always reset. Just as I am fated to protect this world, he is fated to destroy it. It is an endless dance that we have both decided to sit out and let our pieces play."

"Reset? Your... pieces? I don't under—"

"You are one of my pieces, Rey Skylar. You will fight for the salvation of this world, and you will ultimately fail."

"What?!"

"The Hero is the one who was meant to come here. But you are not The Hero, and this isn't yet the right time."

"Ado—?"

"This dance is forever. It keeps going on and on. A never-ending spiral, a web of intricacy. I can do as much to stop it as you can. Do you understand?"

"That's what I've been trying to answer! I don't understand!" Rey responded with sheer frustration. All of those emotions simmered down quickly too.

"You will ultimately fail, Rey Skylar. You won't be able to save this world, just as you won't be able to save your friend."

"No... no, what the hell are you saying? Did you see the future or something? Tell me if you have then! Tell me what you see!"

"There is no 'future' to see. There is only this moment, and what it will lead to. Time isn't the way you think. There really is no past or present or future. There is only what is and what isn't." "...?!"

"What will happen has already happened, but you are yet to see it."

Just as dead stars still shone radiant in the night sky, their demise unable to be noticed by those who cast their gaze upon them until the fullness of 'time', so was the future already a certainty... waiting to happen.

But Rey could not understand any of these things. Or... perhaps he didn't want to.

Did the words of The Oracle frighten him so much that he turned off his imagination, blocking it from fully internalizing all that he was being told.

"If what will happen has already happened, then doesn't that mean all action is meaningless? I don't understand! Are you saying all our actions have already been decided? If so, then what is the point of doing anything?!"

The Oracle, for the first time since the start of their conversation, leaked a small smile and let out a small giggle.

"What is the point indeed..."

Her laughter seemed genuine, but terribly sad. Her gleaming blue eyes looked at Rey with a particular form of melancholy.

—One he could not yet comprehend.

"Fine. I believe you..." Rey whispered, inhaling deeply as he looked at The Oracle in the eyes.

"Then you—"

"If it's all meaningless anyway, then just cure my friend and let me be on my way! Nothing matters, right? Then anything goes, doesn't it?"

"...."

"Oracle, I ask you again..." Rey took a step forward, this time not bowing or displaying any kind of subservience to the one before him.

It was just pure determination fueled by stubbornness.

"... Save my friend!"

Chapter 658 The Oracle's Offer

"I do not deny my ability to grant your desire. I can indeed cure your friend of that which ails her."

The Oracle's response to Rey was cold, and the tiny smile that formed on her face slowly faded away, leaving behind the cold demeanor she had not too long before. Rey noticed this, but his stubbornness made him unable to give up.

"Then—"

"However, just because I can do something doesn't mean I should." The Oracle said in a rather detached tone.

"If you are so desperate for my assistance, then perhaps I can propose some sort of arrangement—a trade of sorts."

Rey raised his eyebrows a little, but his suspicions didn't stop him from jumping on the opportunity as soon as he heard what was being said. "What trade?!"

"I will require a sacrifice from you in order to fulfill your request. I wonder if you possess sufficient resolve for that."

"Sacrifice...?" Rey was beginning to have bad feelings about what he was hearing. Still, he had come too far to turn back at this point. And so, as he swallowed and readied himself for whatever The Oracle would tell him, he asked the question.

"What sacrifice?"

Her hand moved slowly, and she pointed her finger in a particular direction—towards the girl that stood behind him.

"The Half Elf girl. Hand her over, and I will cure your friend."

"H-huh...?"

Somehow, Rey had already expected this outcome. His surprise now was more fabricated than genuine when considering how obvious The Oracle's interests were from the start.

It was clear that Esme and the woman before him shared some connection. The Oracle's desire to have her further proved the point.

But... why? What was the connection?

"Why do you want Esme?" Rey asked, his voice trembling slightly. "Is there nothing else you desire?"

"That is none of your business, Rey Skylar."

He already knew she would respond in such a way, yet he asked the question. At this point, he could no longer stall for time or try to push the issue in any other direction.

He had reached an eventual deadlock after prolonging the inevitable for so long.

"I..."

"Think about it, Rey Skylar. I am more than willing and able to offer you what you desire. Is that not why you came to this Land?"

"...."

"All you have to do is hand her over, and I will grant your wish."

Rey stared hard at The Oracle, allowing the tension he felt to permeate the room for a moment. The choice presented to him was evidently too difficult.

If he gave up Esme, then he would have Alicia, and perhaps obtain a Skill that would remove his need of The Oracle forever. But, if he chose Esme, nothing would change about his current circumstances.

The choice... was it that difficult?

It wasn't for Rey. The answer was already obvious to him. He just needed enough time to think about the follow-up before responding with the only reply he could possibly give.

"I refuse!"

"Oh? Having a change of heart? Perhaps you are not as desperate as I imagined..." As she said this, Rey resorted to an option he prayed would work.

Removing all his spatial layers, he released his full scent into the area. So far, it had worked on all the Elves, helping him solve certain problems that would take forever to accomplish.

If that could work on the stubborn Elves, he hoped it would have at least some effect on The Oracle. Unfortunately, it did not.

"Hm? Did you just do something?" She asked, cocking her head to the side a little.

In all honesty, Rey felt a little mortified by her response to the only plan he could think of to get her on his side. It was painful, but didn't he already expect this?

'Her scent was overpowering at first, but thankfully I've adapted to it. I should have expected her to be unaffected by my scent since she's much stronger than me.'

Her Stats were unreal, and her Skills basically made her a walking cheat code.

'She has a higher Class than I do, and she has an SSS-Tier Skill too. I have more Skills than her overall, but what good would that do for me here?' He swallowed hard as he tried to think of something—anything—that he could do.

"Can I ask a question...?" Rey mumbled as he did his best to observe The Oracle's stoic face.

She shrugged in response.

"You mentioned how I'm not the one meant to see you. That it's the Hero..."

"Indeed."

"So... do you know about Adonis?"

"Indeed. He is a stranger here."

"You mean... an Otherworlder?" Rey raised his brow as he watched The Oracle's expression change ever so slightly.

"Well, there's that too. In any case... why are you here instead of him?"

"I don't know. I didn't know he was the one meant to see you. I don't even know where he is right now." "I see..."

Rey licked his lips a little and attempted yet another question. Depending on the answer, he would know what to do next.

"If Adonis... the Hero... was the one that came here to make his request, would you fulfill his request?"

The Oracle smiled a little as soon as she heard the question.

It almost felt like she read his mind.

"I would. He is The Hero, after all. The central piece of mine, and the one who will lead all the other pieces to the enemy's camp."

As soon as he heard this, Rey realized he wasn't completely out of options.

'If I find Adonis and tell him to help out with Alicia's case by asking The Oracle to help her, then the problem is solved!'

Still, there was one more question on his mind.

"What piece am I on your board?" The Oracle, for the first time, delayed in her response. She observed him for a moment, completely silent.

Finally, she parted her lips and let out the words.

"I... do not know."

Chapter 659 Destiny

"You don't know?"

At this point, Rey raised one of his brows in confusion as even more curiosity ate at him.

'Is it because of my Singularity Class? Am I special in a sense?' His Additional Information did say he possessed the interest of the World... whatever that meant.

"It seems your role remains undecided. Perhaps you will be chosen as the next catalyst? Perhaps some kind of Beast? Either way, you are of no real relevance to the current issue at hand, and yet... you possess one of the six Primeval Skills."

"What?!"

The Oracle's answer was completely different from what he expected.

'I'm not relevant to H'Trae? What does that even mean? If the Primeval Skills are just six, and so far... I know only Adrien and The Oracle have them, then doesn't that make me incredibly important?'

Based on how The Oracle spoke of The Dragon Emperor, it was most likely that he also had one Primeval Skill.

'For some reason, I can't remember the rest of the Primeval Skills I saw on the list that Seraph showed. Other than Skill Creation, I don't know any in any detail. I suppose it makes sense, since I wasn't able to afford them.'

Regardless, if they were only six, and they had the highest rank in H'Trae, then he had to be one of the lead pieces in whatever game this was—not that he even liked the idea at all.

Rey simply wanted to wrap his head around the issue.

'And what does she mean by Beast? As in I'll be summoned to another world as a Beast? Is it the same way Ater and Emil were summoned here? I have so many questions at this point!'

As Rey opened his lips to ask his next question, The Oracle raised her finger to command silence.

'Damn it!'

"I do not want to kill the girl, if that is what you are worried about. In fact, it is quite the opposite." The Oracle shifted her gaze to Esme for a few seconds, causing her to jump a little despite her long period of staying still.

She returned her gaze to Rey and continued.

"I desire for Esme to take my place as the new Oracle. As the new guardian of this world... and keeper of the balance."

Jaws fell the moment Rey and Esme heard this.

In a way, it now made sense why Esme and The Oracle looked alike. If they were connected by some sort of role, in which the former was meant to come into, then it followed.

But, that didn't make it any less jarring.

"I understand your confusion, but perhaps I ought to enlighten you. Doing so might allow you to make a more informed decision." She glanced at Esme once again and made a small smile.

"You too."

There was a reason for their connection, and it was the same reason why Esme felt such a powerful link to The Oracle once they entered the Shrine—almost like feedback.

"You are a part of me, Esme."

Elves are special.

From the moment they are conceived, and then brought into this world, they are deemed to possess immense value.

Part of this reason is because of their deep connection to the world, and how they are often favored by its Laws. They are granted an unnatural lifespan, as well as an absurd growth rate and talent despite being lousy at intense work.

However, there is another reason.

That is because, hidden within every Elf is a 'seed'. The potential to become a High Elf, a transcendent deity that is closer to The Oracle than anything else.

This 'seed' is in their genes—usually latent—until a certain cycle passes, and then one out of the hundreds of thousands of Elves conceives a child who awakens this potential.

One of said children was Ciela.

She was born with natural white hair, blue eyes, and a certain aroma that was sweeter than every other Elf despite being just a child.

From the moment she was born, everyone who laid eyes on her instantly realized that she was the one spoke of in Legends. Most Elves present were not old enough to remember the last High Elf that graced their lands, so they constantly looked at Ciela in wonder.

The few who understood, however—led by the High Elder of the time—guided the young one.

They taught her well, separating her from the rest.

She had a glorious destiny awaiting her, and she would have to one day fulfill it. Ciela matured and became an Elder—even going as far as becoming a member of the Esteemed Council. She was drawing closer and closer to her destiny, and excitement was palpable within the Community.

But then, without any reason whatsoever, she deserted the Elven Community.

Perhaps she felt a little suffocated. She had been taught very strictly her whole life, so it was possible she needed some semblance of freedom. The reason didn't really matter, in all honesty.

What mattered was that she left.

Of course, the Elders were dispatched to seek her out. She was far too valuable—much too special—to be lost in such an absurd way.

It took about a week, but they finally tracked her down and found her.

But, by then... it was already too late.

Ciela had already been defiled by the humans. It was a gangrape, and several of the humans had all decided to have a taste of the exotic flower they had laid eyes on for the first time in their whole lives.

It didn't end well for the humans, though.

Yes, they got to have their fun, but afterwards, Ciela... Ciela went on a rampage and did the unforgivable.

She slaughtered all of those humans!

It was among their corpses and entrails that the Elders found Ciela. She was naked, bare, exposed; standing at the center of such gory horror.

An insane smile was on her face when they saw her, clearly convincing everyone who saw her that she had finally descended into the realm of madness.

Her purity was gone, along with the final vestiges of her sanity.

Ciela could no longer fulfill her destiny—as an Elf, nor as the new Oracle. No one had any high hopes for her... or the little abomination that was growing within her womb.

The Half-Breed vermin that would soon be born.

Chapter 660 Purity

"Your mother, Ciela, became impure for the role of Oracle the moment she took those lives and became impure."

The Oracle told the story in a rather detached tone. While there were hints of sadness here and there, it seemed to stem more out of frustration rather than pity towards the Elf of discussion.

"M-my mother was...? I still can't believe this..." Esme's whispers were stifled.

She cupped both her palms over her mouth as she listened with intensely rising emotion, staring straight at The Oracle as she continued listening to what she was being told.

"She was appropriately punished for what she did, and the child in her womb was going to be executed the moment she was born. But..."

"But what?!" Esme's widened eyes stretched even further as she awaited a response.

"Ciela managed to convince one of her closest friends at the time—the only one who didn't look at her with scorn after her mistake—to help her safely deliver the baby to the human nation."

"Let me guess... Feralia?" Rey's voice echoed within the hall as he narrowed his eyes while speaking.

The Oracle nodded slowly.

"Indeed. Feralia was conflicted about her choice and approached my Shrine for guidance. I could have told her, at the time, to execute you on the spot..." The Oracle looked at Esme with a slight look of compassion.

"But I didn't. I commanded Feralia to spare you and send you off to the human world."

Esme was speechless as she heard this. It was clear she wanted to know more, and she had millions of questions running simultaneously in her mind, with no idea where or how to begin asking them.

"Why did I spare your life, you might ask? Well... it could be the very same reason why I decided to intervene in the moment of your despair and grant you those powers when you needed them the most."

Esme instantly remembered what The Oracle was referring to.

Back then... when she discovered the deaths of her friends and family... she heard a voice. It seemed to be a message from the System, but it also felt different.

It felt personal.

"That System notification back then... that was you?!"

"Indeed." The Oracle nodded. "I cured you of part of your inferior genes and allowed you to awaken some aspects of your natural heritage. I allowed you the strength to make your choice and grow strong."

If that was indeed the case, then it had certain implications—the most important one being what The Oracle went on to state.

"I have been watching you for your whole life, Esme. I did not interfere with your life, just as I do not with your Sisters, but I have keenly observed you all this time." The Oracle smiled.

Her smile this time was so captivating and motherly that even Rey felt his heart tremble and race as he observed the whole exchange.

"It was thanks to his assistance that you were able to return here—to your home—which is why I decided to have an audience with him despite not being the Hero... no offense, Rey Skylar."

"I-I understand..."

Rey's irrelevance had been emphasized time and time again by The Oracle that he was pretty much used to it despite not really understanding how that could be the case.

He was the most powerful Otherworlder at the moment, and he had to be most instrumental in taking down The Dragon Emperor. He was humanity's biggest shot.

Yet, to The Oracle, he wasn't even a piece on her table at all.

'It seems the most important person in this story is Esme. Adonis plays a major part too, it seems...'

Despite having so much power, Rey had never felt so much like an Extra as he did in this particular moment.

But, that didn't mean he didn't have thoughts.

"Esme has killed people, you know?" Rey finally blurted out his thoughts, elucidating yet another implication of The Oracle's choice to aid Esme.

As grateful as Rey was for her assistance, it opened some holes in her story. Not only was The Oracle complicit in the deaths of so many humans, but her new heir also had a lot of blood on her hands.

"Also, Esme is a Half Elf, isn't she? Doesn't that make her impure by your standards? Ah, no offense, Esme." Rey swiftly turned to her as he uttered those words.

"N-no, I was just thinking of that too." She raised both her hands in protest of his apology.

It seemed the two were considering the same thing: Esme should have naturally been disqualified from the position of Oracle based on the current flaws she had.

But—

"Those sins you committed can be blamed on the human aspect of yourself. It is why I allowed you to go ahead; as you still had taints yet to be removed."

Rey said nothing, but he made a silent observation about how racist The Oracle was being towards humans. 'It's no wonder the Elves are this messed up. They followed her example.'

"Esme... I can make you whole. Just as I removed the limiters holding you back, I can also turn you into a full Elf." As soon as The Oracle said this, Esme's expression changed from surprise and confusion to downright shock.

Her mouth was agape and her expression depicted nothing short of stupefaction.

"After completely getting rid of your human side, including all of the sins you committed with it, you will become pure." The Oracle's smile broadened slightly, her small and moist lips beckoning to Esme.

"Once that happens, you will undergo the process of becoming my heir... and Rey Skylar here can have his cure for the friend he came here for."

In essence, this was the best-case scenario—one that benefited everyone in the room.

For a moment, silence reigned supreme, and the three parties stared at each other in what resembled a three-way deadlock.

Then, The Oracle caused her sweet voice to be sent forth as a question.

"So... what do you say to that? Do you accept my offer?"